

[“Folklore of the South”]

TALES - TALL

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER LEVI C. HUBERT

ADDRESS 353 West 118th Street, Apt. 62

DATE October 18, 1938

SUBJECT “FOLKLORE OF THE SOUTH”

1. Date and time of interview

October 18, 1938 - [8?] pm

2. Place of Interview

2 West 112th Street, Manhattan

3. Name and address of informant

Same as place of interview

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

Library of Congress

Joseph Madden Same address

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Average 4-room apartment, in average 10-apartment tenement house. Furnished in mid-Victorian style, modern addition a console radio. All-Negro house in Harlem section, [overerwied?] with pleasant-faced, soft-voiced person, extremely helpful, but the interview could not dissipate the impression we were some queer type of census-taker.

TALES - tall

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER LEVI C. HUBERT

ADDRESS 353 West 118th Street, Apt. 62

DATE October 18, 1938

SUBJECT "FOLKLORE OF THE SOUTH"

The triple Ks, K,K,K.: Every section of the South has been familiar with the Klan, Konclaves, night-riders, white-sheets hastily gathered from clotheslines and wrapped about furtive figures intent upon upholding order and law in a land poisoned by race prejudice.

Library of Congress

Fear and violence were substituted for peace and security, no one knew where a [flaming?] cross was to be burned next, no one knew whose cabin would be invaded, whose son, father or husband would be snatched from his bed and hung upon the nearest pine tree.

A chance encounter in the street with a white woman in broad day, an accidental brush by a Negro against a white woman while walking along a crowded thoroughfare, a slight misunderstanding with a white man, failure of a Negro to remove his tattered hat and step the gutter while passing a white man, a sullen demeanor, the slightest pretext was seized upon by the K.K.K. as reason for the favorite Southern pastime...terror and intimidation of Negroes.

With the Negroes, this real threat to their lives and homes has given rise to some rather tall stories which are often told in a humorous manner, but it cannot be denied that these stories arise from one of the most pernicious practices current on the American scene.

As told to me by Mrs. Cole and members of her family:

A Negro tinsmith and his son were repairing a roof on a building in the business section of a Southern city. The tinsmith made a misstep, faltered, and plunged over the edge of the roof. His son, noted the precipitate descent of the unlucky 2 man, noticed something else...a white woman walking along, directly in the path of his father.

"Oh, Paw. Look out below. You'll land on a white woman." So great was the Negro's fear of harming a white woman, he halted his downward flight, reversed himself, regained the roof. His relief [over the escape?] from death was subordinate to his relief that he had not hurt the white woman. TICKLE BARRELS - Tickle barrels are an institution in every Southern town. Placed upon convenient corners in the white section, they are intended to be utilized by Negroes whose business brings them out of Jimtown. The idea is that any Negro feeling the desire to laugh out loud (and thereby might annoy the whites) must rush

Library of Congress

to the barrel, remove the lid, and place his head in it. The guffawn, hysterical giggles, and other manifestations of the Negro who is tickled, is in that manner confined to the barrel, and the dignity and decorum of a Southern city is not offended.

Then there is the one about the Negro who was lynched because he actually had the temerity to whip a white horse in his possession. Also the Southern cullid person who came to an unfortunate end because he allowed a black rooster in the same chicken yard with a flock of [White Cocks?].

I was asked to believe that colored people in the south were compelled to wear only colored shirts and collars. The only exception to this rule was in the case of ministers, who were allowed to wear white collars, but the collars must be dirty. In those communities where Negroes are allowed in the same theatre with the whites, they must enter by a separate entrance, and sit in the gallery only. When a song is finished, or a comedian has gotten over his jokes, the whites seated in the orchestra applaud first, then the gallery has its chance. 3 FEAR OF GRAVEYARDS

A youth, agile, strong and supple, was walking along a country road, accompanied by his aged grandfather, almost incapacitated by the infirmities of age and compelled to hobble along in an uncertain fashion, assisted by a cane and the firm arm of the grandson.

The two were compelled to make frequent halts by the wayside and although they had started their journey while the sun was still high, yet the [pauses?] which the old man requested had stretched their trip until the afternoon sun had long before hidden itself behind the towering pines in the western hills.

On one of their pauses they seated themselves on a stone which lay beside the road, and there the old man rested and attempted to catch his breath and fight off the overpowering fatigue which further impeded his slow progress.

Library of Congress

They had no sooner seated themselves than a ghostly figure also seated himself beside them.

"There don't seem to be but three of us here tonight," commented the addition to the group.

One quick look and the young fellow got to his feet and saw that a cemetery skirted the road at that point.

"Yea, but ther aint gonna be but the two of you in a minute," so off he went, disregarding his grandfather's plea not to be left behind. As the grandson ran down the road, he surprised a rabbit hurrying along. "[Git outa dar?], rabbit, and let somebody run as kin run".

The distance covered by the running youngster was a little over five miles, and he did it in double-quick time. But, just as he reached home and tried to close the door after him, he felt someone pushing against it and heard his grandfather say, "Don't slam the door in your poor old grandpappy's face, son."